

## Visiting an HIV Orphanage

The director was telling us that when they started this particular orphanage their mortality rate among the infants was nearly 50%. The orphanage was almost a hospice for children. She said this with a slight glistening of tears in her eyes, and then very proudly announced that they had not lost a single child in the past year. The improvement was due to better care techniques, a more seasoned staff, and the fact that all the children were on special high nutrition diets. She told us that they needed special diets to ensure that they were strong in order to have the greatest chance of fighting off small infections which, in an HIV child, could ultimately be fatal. They were doing everything they could to build up the children's resistance.



At about this time the children came out to play, and what a time we had. We brought all kinds of small toys and stuffed animals with us so that each child could have at least one stuffed animal to play with. The kids were simply delighted with their new toys. They all hugged us. Many of the children, primarily the little girls, just wanted to be held and fussed with. We

were very willing to do that duty. There was one particular little two-year-old girl in a pretty little red dress with tiny little white flowers on it who seemed to find me particularly fascinating. Perhaps the white goatee on my chin reminded her of a now lost family member. She held her little arms out to me so I picked her up and she just cuddled against me for a while. I gave her a small light brown teddy bear and she smiled and hugged it tightly to her. She looked so serious. I sat down on a low retaining wall and just continued to cuddle her. She buried her face into my arm and was very, very content to just sit there being held. It was just so hard to believe, and so hard to handle emotionally, that all of these darling little children were HIV positive and had a potential death sentence hanging over their heads. We laid hands on all of them and prayed, at one point or another, while we were with them. The phrase that kept going through my mind was, "this just isn't fair". No, life is not fair. But it is what it is, and it is up to us as individuals and collectively, to try to make a difference.

